January 2, 2019

MEMORANDUM

TO: City and County Superintendents of Education

FROM: Eric G. Mackey
State Superintendent of Education

RE: Student Assessment

Earlier this year, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) awarded contracts to Data Recognition Corporation, Inc. (DRC). These contracts provide DRC the opportunity to partner with the state to design, develop, administer the new state summative assessment, and the new alternate assessment as well as provide clear and comprehensive reports back to districts in a timely manner.

As an integral part of the process that culminated the awarding of the contracts, the ALSDE met with the Student Assessment Advisory Committee to gather feedback about aspects of the assessments that superintendents and educators wanted included going forward. During the meetings, discussions were addressed about which grades/subjects to include in the summative assessment and which formative assessment would be provided to schools and systems.

In the fall of 2018, a planning meeting between ALSDE and DRC staff convened to discuss the design and timeline for the development of each assessment. The finalized parameters of the summative assessment are as follows:

- The new summative assessment will be administered to Grades 2-8 once a year starting in the spring of 2020.
- The assessment will be administered 100 percent online, with the exception of a documented need for paper assessments (IEP, 504 Plan, or I-ELP).
- The content areas to be assessed are math and English/language arts, including a writing section. In addition, an assessment in science will be administered to Grades 4, 6, and 8.
- The Grade 2 assessment will not be used for measuring achievement for accountability purposes but will serve as a baseline of growth for Grade 3.
- The writing assessment will only be administered to students in Grades 4-8 and will comprise a text-dependent analysis in order to develop a comprehensive and holistic essay response. The demand required of a student’s reading and writing skills in response to a text-dependent analysis prompt is similar to the demands required for a student to be college and career ready.
- The test items will be aligned with the Alabama Courses of Study.
- The test items will be written and reviewed by Alabama educators selected from a pool of subject-matter experts identified superintendents. In addition to subject-matter experts, specialists in the fields of special education, hearing and visually impaired, and English-language learners (ELLs) will be included in these activities. Nominations for educators in all content areas are still needed. Participants may use the Superintendent Nomination Link to make recommendations for committee work on both summative assessments.
• A stand-alone field test of the items will be administered in May 2019.
• Beginning in 2020 after the first administration of the operational forms, the DRC will release a set of sample items.

The purpose of this field test is to pilot the test items written by Alabama educators to see how the items perform in a real-world setting with real students. It is not an assessment of the student’s proficiency in a subject area, although students should be encouraged to perform well on the test. Furthermore, the results of the field test will be used to evaluate test items, not students. The DRC will provide schools and systems with student performance comparison reports that will show where a student scored in comparison to all students participating in the field test. These reports are for informational purposes only and should not be used for any decision making regarding students, teachers, or schools.

The ALSDE will provide criterion-referenced assessments in Grades 2-8 that will be closely aligned to Alabama Courses of Study and reflect National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)-type rigor, format, and reporting. The assessments will also incorporate the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements as well as the requirements to meet federal peer review. The new summative assessments will contain a variety of item format types including multiple-choice, evidence-based, selected-response, technology-enhanced, constructed-response, and performance-based. A representative sample of these items can be accessed at https://drcbeacon.com/online-tools-training/.

Development of the new alternate assessment should begin in January 2019 with the anticipated full administration field test in the spring of 2020. There will be many opportunities for educators to participate in the development process of this assessment. The new alternate assessment will be administered to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in Grades 2-8, 10, and 11 in English language arts, mathematics, and science. The structure of the assessment is a paper format using an online system to collect individual student responses to multiple choice and performance task items.

In conjunction with the assessment task force/advisory committee, ALSDE leadership determined that Scantron’s Performance Series and Achievement Series assessments will provide the best opportunity for measuring the educational progress of Alabama’s students and a contract was signed to extend its presence in Alabama’s schools for at least the next three years. Utilizing Performance and/or Achievement Series in a school or classroom will be the decision of the local education agency, but the cost will be borne by the ALSDE. An additional feature, Scantron Analytics, will also be available to districts at no cost starting in the fall of 2019.

For any questions, please contact Mrs. Maggie Hicks, Coordinator, Student Assessment, at mhicks@alsde.edu or at 334-694-4817.

EGM/MH/SW

cc: City and County System Test Coordinators
    Dr. Daniel Boyd
    Dr. Tony Thacker

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